NEWS

Winchester Affordable Housing Trust looks to renovate 160 Forest St., possibly build ADU on property

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

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The Winchester Affordable Housing Trust has settled on the renovation and sale of the property at 160 Forest St. However, the board is also looking at the possibility of an accessory dwelling on the property.
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While talk around Winchester has been focused on what to do with the property the town inherited at 160 Forest St. — build a large project, sell or rent — the Affordable Housing Trust last week made it clear what the plans will be.

The AHT met Aug. 25 to discuss where it currently stands on the property, which was left to the town by Martha Chase Rice in her will when she died in November 2020.

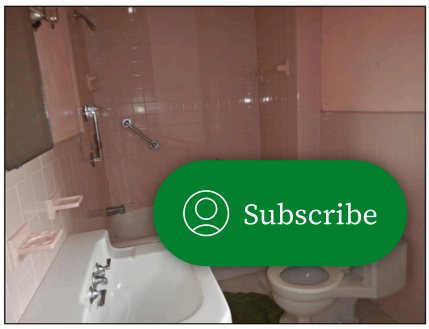
While there were early questions during the 2024 Fall Town Meeting about building a large project on the land, AHT members said the town is looking at the renovation of the main house in order to sell it at a substantially lower rate than market price.

The house is under a deed restriction that will forever make it affordable housing for buyers who qualify at 80% of the area median income, or approximately $132,000 for a family of four.

AHT member Steve Cagnetta said there has been a lot going on over the summer in terms of the house.

“We’ve had two inspections now,” he said. “The building has good bones. It needs a new roof, but it doesn’t have a lot of leaks. The walls are also good. The systems, however, need attention...the plumbing and electrical.”

The last inspection was conducted July 1 by Paul Cornell and Associates, of Wilmington. Click here to read the full 91-page inspection report.



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A look at the kitchen, common area and one of the bathrooms inside 160 Forest St. COURTESY PHOTOS/TOWN OF WINCHESTER/AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

The 1,624-square foot house is a 1938 Cape with three bedrooms, one full and one half bath that sits on a 10,694-square foot lot. The Assessor's Office currently values the house at $952,200.

The property also has a garage that has seen better days.

AHT member Kris Galletta said the board has taken a careful approach in terms of just how to make the most out of the Forest Street property.

"We've thought long and hard on whether it should be for sale or a rental, but we made no final decision," Galletta said. "We've tried to make this a thoughtful process. We know that if we make it a rental, there will be ongoing obligation that we be landlords. So, we do prefer the sale of the property."

AHT Chair Marty Jones said the board has reached out to other communities that have taken the landlord route and what they've learned definitely has them leaning at renovating and selling.

Jones added Winchester has such few opportunities for affordable housing properties like this.

"This is relatively new to us as a trust, so we are curious to see how it's going to work," she said. "This could be a lot of work for one or two units."

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That second unit would possibly be an Accessory Dwelling Unit (
While Winchester initially passed its own ADU ordinance in November

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2022, Town Meeting updated it last year after the state passed its own law in 2024 to allow ADUs "under 900 square feet to be built by-right in single-family zoning districts."

"It would be a small freestanding structure or something attached to the house," Jones said, of a possible ADU. "There's not a lot of accessible land. We could do two fully accessible bedrooms. We could figure out a way to do it."

Galletta said using the long driveway, there are ways that it could access both the house and an ADU.

Abutters at the meeting, however, pointed out that Forest Street at the 160 location is quite a busy roadway. They stated it's already difficult for some residents in the area to get in and out of their driveways.

The Affordable Housing Trust is looking at possibly turning this garage into an ADU. COURTESY OF WINCHESTER/AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

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And, others pointed out that putting an ADU on the property would require demolishing the garage.

Town Meeting member Ann Sera cautioned the AHT board that the house is likely built on ledge and that would mean blasting to lay down a foundation for an ADU.

"You're going to need a geotechnical survey due to the ledge," she said.

While Galletta said the board is aware of the ledge issues, Sera said it's important that the town is looking at this renovation "realistically."

"We are aware of all the challenges," Galletta said. "We just need to explore all the options to see if we're missing any opportunities. We are doing our due diligence."

What's next?

What to do with the property and how to do it is still a process the AHT is working through. The board did say a website with all the information about 160 Forest St. is in the works. In the meantime, however, residents can check out the town website for the latest information and to read the current house inspection report.

Additionally, AHT put in an application with the Community Preservation Act Pilot Program on Aug. 1 to the tune of $350,000.

According to the CPA application, the AHT estimates the total cost of renovating the house at $600,000 with an additional $250,000 for an ADU, if that's feasible.

The CPA funds would allow the town to cover a portion of the ma
renovation while the ADU could be put off until after the house has been

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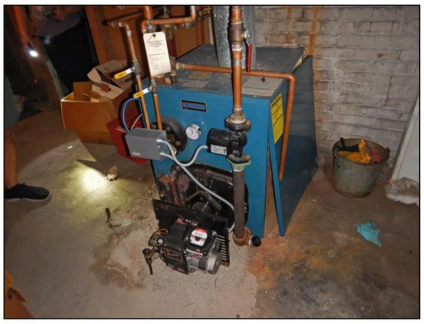
sold, possibly using funds from the sale itself.

The AHT expects the resale price of the house will be $400,000 or less based on the affordability restrictions.

Planning Board Chair Brian Vernaglia and other residents at last week's meeting suggested AHT members look at renovating the main house for no more than $400,000 and then selling it for the same price in order to break even.



While the 160 Forest St. house has been deemed to be structurally sound, inspectors say its systems, such as heating, plumbing and electrical, are in need of an upgrade. COURTESY PHOTOS/TOWN OF WINCHESTER/AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST

Neighbor Ben Resnik commented it seemed the town was putting a lot of resources into one unit, and possibly an ADU. He also suggested the break-even scenario for the property.

"Well, we do need to more forward on this," Galletta said, of the project. "If we don't, the house will go to waste. It will just sit there."

While AHT does not have a set timeline on the project, Cagnetta did say Winchester is working to bring a project consultant on board. That should be announced sometime in the next 30 to 60 days.

Jones added once that person comes on board, AHT will remain involved in how the project proceeds.

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"We wouldn't be comfortable just turning it over to someone," she said. "The trust will stay very involved."

Cagnetta agreed.

"The ideal is to find someone who will work with us from start to finish," he said, of the project. "Our main goal is to get this house into someone's hands. That's what we're all here to do."

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